

MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

"I'm blessed to have a great team working with me," she acknowledges. "Janice Westom and Tom Kinley have been with me for 15 years, and Manuel, Justin, Tony, Jason and Juan almost as long. We brainstorm for weeks about every event and they implement the details." The eight full-time employees are supplemented with a crew of around 50 servers who have worked on her events consistently over the years and are somehow always cheerful, helpful, and efficient. Regardless of the event, it's a production that unfolds with a series of surprises that engage and energize people. And energy is what makes a successful party.

The Biggies

Take the annual Houston Halloween Party, for example. Shari has collaborated with Jackie Lee and Jim Houston for 25 years, including designing and implementing this better-than-Disney, invitation-only costume party for as many as 400 people in their back yard. It takes at least five days to set up the props and décor for a party that lasts only 3 hours. Each year's theme is a carefully guarded secret, and the regular valet crew loves watching the guests' faces when they get their first glimpse of what might be ahead as they weave through the prop-filled garden path leading to The Event.

In those first moments everyone is a child, wide-eyed and excited. And then they reach the party lawn with musicians, magicians, perky waiters and waitresses, unrecognizably costumed friends and neighbors, and bigger-than-life decorations. The endless buffet is laden with a fragrant and colorful variety of hot and cold "finger foods" that are easy to consume while circulating among the costumed guests and playing the game of "Who are you?" The dance floor is quickly jammed. At nine, the guests leave reluctantly, elated and exhausted. The following day, Shari and the Houstons start planning the next Halloween party.

The Bob Hope Classic Ball, which has been a major fund-raising event for Coachella Valley charities since 1963, has been one of Shari's clients for the last five years. Using one of Hope's "Road to..." films of the 40s, 50s, and 60s as a theme each year has inspired her to create events at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort in Indian Wells with the essence of exotic destinations like Rio, Morocco and Zanzibar. The hotel's culinary team works closely with Shari to deliver an exquisite meal apropos of the theme and the black tie guests who pay handsomely to attend.

The Palm Springs International Film Festival Gala may be the most glamorous of Shari's events, if only because she has to make certain that the décor is worthy of the many Hollywood luminaries who attend.

Her most recent "big name" event client is the BNP Paribas Players Party for 400. "This is a younger, interna-

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